CINEMA 16 FILM NOTES 1955/1956

S C O O P ! ALFRED HITCHCOCK TO PRESENT KEY SEQUENCE FROM AS YET UNRELEASED "THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH" AT CINEMA 16; YOU MUST REQUEST A TICKET TO BE ABLE TO ATTEND

The date: Wednesday, March 28th, 8 PM, at the Central Needle Trades Auditorium. Only a limited number of tickets are available for this " bonus event " since Mr. Hitchcock will appear only once. Please note the procedure: Your regular membership ticket will not admit you to this event. Tickets will be sent to the first 1600 members who request them by sending us a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (One ticket per member; guest tickets will not be valid.)

COMING ATTRACTIONS AT THE BEEKMAN THEATRE; USE YOUR DISCOUNTS

Here are some of the many unusual films you will be able to view in the next few weeks in the comfort and intimacy of the Beekman Theatre, undoubtedly one of the most luxurious art theatres in town: Guys and Dolls, The Rose Tattoo, The Trouble with Harry, The Night My Number Came Up, I'll Cry Tomorrow, Letters from my Windmill. Consult your daily newspaper for dates - and remember that your discount card will admit both you and a guest.

MEMBERSHIPS ARE STILL AVAILABLE FOR ALL SERIES

Tell your friends that membership can begin with any performance during the season and continues for a full year thereafter; nothing is lost by joining now.

SPECIAL EVENTS HELD ON WEDNESDAYS ONLY: BETTER SEATING AT 9:30 PM

As per our spring brochure, special events are held on Wednesdays only; while you may attend either at 7:15 or 9:30 PM, better seating is available at the 9:30 PM show.

BEEKMAN SUNDAY SERIES II MEMBERS: PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

Please cross out the May 13th date on your ticket and change it to May 6th.

Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W.12, Friday March 16, 8 PM for reduced $ 1.00 admission rate ($ 1.50 without coupon) to C 16 Film Center session: The short story: QUARTET (Speaker: Arthur Knight)	Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W.12, Friday March 23, 8 PM for reduced $ 1.00 admission rate ($ 1.50 without coupon) to C 16 Film Center session: The great novel: CRIME & PUNISHMENT	Present this coupon at lobby boxoffice of New School, 66 W.12, Friday March 30, 8 PM for reduced $ 1.00 admission rate ($ 1.50 without coupon) to C 16 Film Center session: Film & TV: MARTY (surprise guest speaker!)

NIGORIYE (Stained Image) Japan, 1953 (128 minutes)

Directed by Tadashi Imai. Script by Yoko Mizuki and Toshiro Ide, based on stories by Ichiyo Higuchi. Photographed by Shinichiro Nakao. Designed by Totetsu Hirakawa. Produced and distributed by Shochiku Films.

I - Night of the Full Moon: Father..Ken Mitsuda; Mother..Akiko Tamura; Daughter.. Yatsuko Tanami; Ricksha man.. Hiroshi Akutagawa.
II - December Thirty-First: Servant girl, Miné..Yoshiko Kuga; The mistress .. Teruko Nagaoka; Her Husband.. Shin Tatsuoka; Her stepson.. Noboru Nakaya; Miné's aunt.. Michiko Araki; Miné's uncle.. Shinro Nakamura.
III - The New Town (originally "Stained Image"): O-Riki, geisha.. Chikage Awashima; Gen, her lover.. Seiji Miyaguchi; Ohatsu, his wife.. Haruko Sugimura; Patron.. So Yamamura.

(We have invited Jay Leyda to write our program note this month, dealing with NIGORIYE in the context of Japanese film production as a whole. Mr. Leyda's viewpoint, as expressed below, is of special interest since he has managed to see more Japanese films of all types than any other American critic. Mr. Leyda is the author of the first English evaluation of Kurosawa's films (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1954); the translator of Eisenstein's FILM FORM and THE FILM SENSE.)

" In NIGORIYE'S third story the geisha O-Riki tells of her miserable childhood, and at the moment when the child O-Riki stumbles in the winter street and her bowl of food falls into the mud, I suddenly recognized the stylistic parent of the whole film - Mark Donskoi's Gorky trilogy, especially The Childhood of Maxim Gorky. Though admired in all countries, Donskoi's films have attracted few followers outside Soviet studios, but Imai's film, with its mixture of the tender and violent, the soothing word, the frustrated silence, the pressures, and hopes, derives in the most admirable way from the film seen on Cinema 16's last program.

I can imagine that Imai and the writers of his script saw in the stories of Ichiyo Higuchi a Japanese counterpart of the keen observation in Gorky's autobiography - to which Higuchi had added the more conscious shapeliness of Maupassant. Ichiyo Higuchi was publishing her first stories at the age of 20, and by then she had experienced as much poverty and pain as Gorky knew in his youth. In her 'teens, to support her mother, her younger sister and herself, she kept a small shop near the red-light district of Tokyo, and it was her sensitive observation of the sacrifices of both pride and humanity in the brothels and slums that enrich her stories. It seems so just that the Maupassant or Gorky of Japanese literature should have been a woman, as its Proust was a Lady Murasaki; in either 12th or 19th century, a Japanese woman could see more clearly beneath the surface of Japanese society than the self-deluded men. By 1896 Higuchi was dead at 29, of tuberculosis, but she had made herself spokesman of the anonymous.

The three stories chosen for this film are variations on the theme of humiliation, but in each we see decency struggling so obstinately to survive that the total effect is not one of gloom. In each it is money and the lack of it that pushes the characters to action or doom. We feel as much compassion for these middle-class victims of the 1880's as for the victims from the lowest strata. In the first story, of a middle-class domestic tragedy, we are given an unexpected glimpse of far more miserable

(and more hopeful!) circumstances. For the second story it should be kept in mind that December 31 is the traditional day for settling all debts, and this is developed not only with money but with irony; a servant girl, Mine, links two family crises, her own and her employer's. The third story shows the themes of hope and defeat in their sharpest contrast.

Imai has directed these with emphasis on the tangible; you are made physically aware of the expressive muscles of a face or back, of makeshift tools and patched walls. You can touch the whole film. And Imai doesn't hesitate to show you the sweat or vomit of his people. To maintain the naturalistic tone of Higuchi's stories Imai recruited most of his cast from the Bungaku Za, a realistic theatre specializing in the modern plays of Ibsen and Chekhov, and whose latest successes include A Streetcar Named Desire and Kingsley's Detective Story. There are three actors in Imai's cast who have appeared many times in films; Hiroshi Akutagawa, the ricksha man of the first story, is the son of the great writer (on whose stories Rashomon was based) and one of Japan's important new actors - playing Hamlet in a new translation last year; Awashima who plays O-Riki has acted in both jidai and gendai films; and Seiji Miyaguchi (the tragic Gen of the last story) already has a series of remarkable film portraits to his credit, including roles in Kurosawa's Living and Seven Samurai. None of Imai's previous work has been seen here; NIGORIYE was completed in 1953 and was chosen as best film of that year by the Japanese Film Critics Association.

A NOTE ON NEGLECT

Imagine how different our attitude to Italian films would be - and how it would have influenced the course of film history - if the only post-war Italian films that reached this side of the Atlantic had been epics of Roman history and the Renaissance, nothing but Fabiolas, Quo Vadises, Last Days of Pompeiis, Ben Hurs, Messalinas, and other beautifully sure things guaranteed to find American distributors and customers, and return enough profit to breed more of the same. We would have heard rumors of a shabby group of obscure film-makers - their names sounded like Rosselino, Vizzontini,de Sicra? - who bragged of making realistic films about modern Italy. Realistic! - why, these ugly little films were too unpleasant for American audiences - probably subversive,too. One of these films - about a bicycle !! - was praised abroad, but fortunately was not inflicted on us.

This sounds ridiculous only because it didn't happen that way. The slim margin of chance between this fantasy and what actually happened was a courageous distributor named Joseph Burstyn, for it was only his belief in Open City that opened American theatres to the series of great and original Italian films that we cannot now dissociate from our post-war film experience.

Unhappily, this fantasy is true - in our present relations to Japanese films. With the one exception of Kurosawa's Rashomon, the Japanese films we are shown are near the lowest levels of Japanese film-making - the "sure things" of the Japanese film industry. Burstyn died before he could show us that behind the gorgeous,exotic and commonplace facade of "ancient Japan", reproduced on film by the hundreds,in patterns as fixed as those of a western, there was another Japanese film - dealing with modern subjects in experimental forms as bold as the best of the Italian post-war films.

To anyone aware of the whole scope of modern Japanese film art it has been distressing to hear the almost unqualified praise given to films that are repeating hackneyed film forms and subjects, while our theatres remain closed to the really great Japanese films. Inevitably, the repetition of the shallow, and the inflation of the specious hurry their own end; Sid Caesar's parody, Ubetu, was the symptom of an end. Critics and audiences are already growing suspicious that they are being taken in. It is encouraging to read Bosley Crowther's scepticism of the worth of Samurai and The Golden Demon, but he is wrong to assume that their error was in being brought here. The error was in their production, for these (and too many others on their way here) were produced primarily for foreign consumption. Eastman Color is added to the budgets only of those potboilers deemed safe for America and Europe. Samurai is an especial affront; though we saw Rashomon's imitations after we saw the model, the imitation Samurai won the race to America over Kurosawa's important Seven Samurai (not yet released in the U.S.), of which it is, inspite of Eastman Color, a pale copy. The American distributor rubs salt in the wound by taking the title of Samurai, to make the reception of Seven Samurai here that much more dubious. Because it was first to show us how ingeniously Japanese film-makers can use color, Gate of Hell so dazzled us that we could not detect the ordinary film underneath, a mélange of success-elements gleaned chiefly from Rashomon and directed by the safest, oldest director in the business there.

As is to be expected, it is the boldest of Japanese film artists, the most imitated and least imitative of directors there, Akira Kurosawa, whose contributions to world film progress are longest getting to us. Anyone who has seen Rashomon can guess that we are missing something, but the nature of this something cannot be guessed until we see his other films, for each one changes its style and method with its aim. His greatest work has been in the modern Japanese subjects as yet tabu in this country, and we shall know little of Japanese films without seeing his Drunken Angel, Stray Dog, Living and I Live in Fear. He refuses to capitulate to the distinction between jidai and gendai; the former being a term inclusive of all films of the past, heroic, fantastic, or merely "sword-plays", while gendai is a term for modern (meaning the past century) or realistic subjects. Kurosawa likes to draw upon Kabuki or Noh principles in his modern films, while on the other hand, his Seven Samurai has all the immediacy of a contemporary subject - without the sentiment of a routine gendai film.

While we wait for the work of Kurosawa to reach us, it is valuable to catch every glimpse of the several talents working exclusively in gendai. Aside from the sentimental example of The Golden Demon and Hiroshima (sentimental, sensational and without substance or point of view), little gendai has reached American audiences. (Exceptions are the showings of Japanese films at New York's Buddhist Church, 171 West 94 Street, to which Non-Japanese are welcomed, and the forthcoming festival of Japanese film art by the University of California at Los Angeles, which will concentrate on this neglected aspect of Japanese films by showing only important gendai films of the past two years.)

In the meantime, and on this coast, Cinema 16 broadens our film-going by showing a distinguished example of gendai - NIGORIYE. "

Jay Leyda

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